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SUBJECT: GETTING THE VOTE OUT: HOW UNITED RUSSIA PULLED OFF
THE DUMA ELECTIONS

REF: A. MOSCOW 5432
[1](#)B. MOSCOW 5548

Classified By: POL M/C Alice G. Wells. Reasons: 1.4 (b,d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: A comparison of electoral statistics from the December 2 Duma elections and the previous elections in a number of selected regions shows that United Russia's use of administrative assets to get out an increased number of voters made a difference in the December 2 Duma elections. Voters for Just Russia, the Union of Right Forces (SPS), and the Communist Party still participated but, given the huge increase in voters for United Russia they -- with the exception of the Communists -- received a smaller percentage of the vote than in 2003. The additional 500,000 absentee ballots issued counted for only a small part of the over 9 million more votes cast this time around than in 2003. This message reviews in more detail election results in those regions to which Embassy has traveled in the last year. End summary.

United Russia, Communists Improve

[1](#)2. (C) United Russia received substantially more than the majority of votes in all but a few regions throughout Russia in the December 2 Duma elections. It doubled its vote count from just under 23 million votes in 2003 (38 percent of the vote) to almost 45 million in 2007 (64 percent of the vote). Of the other parties, only the Communist Party (KPRF) increased its take, going from just under 7,650,000 votes in 2003 to around 8,100,000 votes on December 2. The increase in United Russia votes is most certainly due to its administrative ability to pressure people into voting, its decision to cast the Duma vote as a referendum on Putin after his decision to head the United Russia candidate list and Putin's own eleventh hour appeals to voters to support United Russia. The increase in support for the Communists shows their success in casting themselves as the only relevant opposition party. This contrasts to the widely-held belief that support for the Communists among voters would wane as the ranks of their largest constituency, pensioners who had it better under the Soviet Union, thin out.

Some Regions Do Too Well,
Others Not Well Enough

[1](#)3. (SBU) Voter participation across Russia did not vary greatly, except in the Caucasus, where United Russia won over 90 percent of the vote and the Republic of Mordovia, where some local precincts initially gave United Russia over 100 percent of the vote (later revised by the regional election commission to "only" 94.5 percent). United Russia fared less well in the Far East, the Altai territory, Moscow and St. Petersburg (just over 50 percent) and even worse in Voronezh

and the Nenetskiy autonomous districts (at or just under 50 percent). The media report that some governors and local United Russia leaders are being held responsible for the bad results in their regions. Turnout in the rural parts of the Omsk region was 20 percent higher than in Omsk city and the regional governor has blamed the mayor for failing to get out the vote and, according to The Moscow Times, the mayor of a village in Bashkortostan paid the ultimate price for his election shortcomings -- he hanged himself on the eve of the election after superiors chided him for not doing enough to secure over 80 percent support for United Russia. Few commentators believe that Yuriy Luzhkov and Valentina Matvienko, the mayors of Moscow and St. Petersburg, respectively, will pay any price for their citizens' election choices, however.

14. (SBU) The Communists (KPRF) did best in the so-called "red belt," polling several points above the national average in Voronezh, Samara, and Novosibirsk. Their luck ran out in Rostov-on-Don, where the United Russia ticket led by a popular, long-sitting governor pulled in over 70 percent of the vote. The KPRF ran a respectable second in Rostov with 10.3 percent of the vote (down from almost 15 percent in 2003), enough to grab one seat from the region. Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR) registered an almost 20 percent drop in support from 2003 across Russia. In 2003, it garnered almost 7,000,000 votes, but got only 5,700,000 in 2007. Still, it increased its number of deputies from 29 to a projected 40 in the next Duma. As was the case in the last election, the LDPR did best in the Far East, reportedly getting 13 percent in the Primorskiy region and Khabarovsk and 11 percent in Chita and Magadan. Just Russia may have just gotten into the next Duma on the strength of its performance in St. Petersburg (16 percent), Astrakhan (20 percent) and Stavropol (13 percent). In the

end, Just Russia lost over 3,000,000 votes that its constituent parties (Rodina, the Russian Party of Pensioners/Party of Justice, and Party of Russian Rebirth/Russian Life Party) had polled in the 2003 Duma elections. Nationally, the Union of Right Forces (SPS) saw its vote count drop by 72 percent. Given the higher turnout for the December 2 election, this drop translated into a decrease of overall voter support from 4 percent in 2003 to only 1 percent in 2007.

Problematic Voting: A Problem?

15. (SBU) Some election observers have raised the issue of early voting and the use of absentee ballots. While the election violations are serious in any event, the absentee and early numbers involved do not appear to be large enough to affect the turnout. The number of early voters in Russia increased 23 percent from 2003 to 2007; however even at 90,000, earlier voters account for only 0.1 percent of the entire vote cast on December 2. Similarly, the number of absentee ballots cast more than doubled; however, they represent less than two percent of all votes cast. (The use of the term "absentee ballot" is a bad translation of the Russian term "okrepitel'nyy talon." Russians, with few exceptions, can only vote on election day. They cannot mail their ballot as U.S. citizens do, but must go to their local election commission to receive a certificate indicating they have been removed from the voting registry of their home district. They can then take this certificate to any polling station on the day of elections. If the certificate is lost or stolen, that voter cannot vote.)

Siberia: Mostly Quiet

16. (C) In the Tomsk region, our contacts report that the election went off without incident. Aleksandr Prokopevich, the Deputy Editor of Tomsk Novosti, said that there had been reports of falsified election results, but he had seen no "facts" to support those allegations. According to CEC data, United Russia received approximately 57 percent of the vote

in Tomsk, an increase of more than 10 percent over what the party polled in regional elections in March 2007. Prokopevich suggests that this resulted from Putin's decision to be the "locomotive" for the United Russia ticket, because Putin is more popular than even well-regarded Tomsk Governor Kress who headed the list last March. Rural voters in Tomsk turned out in even greater numbers in support of United Russia -- roughly 70 percent -- whereas only around 50 percent of urban voters picked Putin's new party, an increase of 2-3 percent. The Yabloko representative to the regional legislative assembly, Vasiliy Eremin, viewed the election with greater concern, seeing the use of administrative resources (such as directing students in Tomsk city to vote for United Russia) and the overwhelming dominance of the "party of power" on television, as shaping the election results. He was depressed that SPS had lost ground in an "academic city" like Tomsk, where educated elites have traditionally supported liberal parties. SPS in particular suffered from direct administrative pressure, which Eremin said had led to a drop from 7.7 percent in the March regional elections to less than 2 percent in the Duma election, which put it behind Yabloko. Prokopevich suggested that many who supported the liberals earlier may have turned their votes to United Russia, which had "delivered" on promises of economic growth and stability that the "liberals" had promised, but failed to deliver.

17. (SBU) Voting in other Siberian regions also proceeded without incident, although the KPRF accusing the administration of "stealing" votes. KPRF head Gennadiy Zyuganov singled out the Kemerovo region in his complaints about election procedures on December 2. In Kemerovo, the governor is a former communist himself and the KPRF viewed the region's coal mining towns as fertile ground. Results there differed sharply from other Siberian regions, looking more like those from the North Caucasus. Total turnout was 80% (compared to 60% in neighboring Krasnoyarsk, Tomsk and Irkutsk), with 75% of the voters supporting United Russia. The KPRF also noted problems in Krasnoyarsk Kray, describing the election as a "triumph of administrative resources." In the April regional elections, the Communists had won 20 percent of the vote. However, only approximately 12 percent of Krasnoyarsk region voters checked the box for KPRF on December 2, compared to 60% for United Russia. The KPRF continues to protest the outcome, calling for the governor of Kemerovo region -- as well as others -- to be removed from power and initiating a suit with the Constitutional Court to have the CEC invalidate the results.

18. (C) From all reports, the campaign in Irkutsk was quiet and boring. Galina Solokina of Teleinform, a news and information agency in Irkutsk, claimed that the outcome was expected prior to the election. There were many political party and international observers in the regions, and violations were relatively few in number. United Russia received 57 percent of the vote, lower than its national tally of 64 percent. Altay Kray, another Siberian region, also proved less bountiful for United Russia at 54 percent. When we visited these regions earlier in the year, contacts reported that Siberia supported United Russia less than the rest of the country, a contention supported by the election results. Solokina maintained December 6 that protest votes in Irkutsk went to LDPR and KPRF. However, a comparison of the election results of 2003 and 2007 suggests otherwise. In Altay Kray and Irkutsk, all parties except United Russia saw a decrease in the number of votes received. KPRF in Altay Kray lost only one percent of the vote, to win a healthy 17 percent in December, while in Irkutsk all parties except United Russia lost more than 10 percent. In both regions, United Russia doubled its vote count.

19. (C) LDPR received 10 percent of the vote in Altay Kray and 11 percent in Irkutsk compared with its 8 percent national showing. In both instances, however, the vote for LDPR was lower than the 16 percent received by the party in both regions in 2003. The KPRF fared better in Altay Kray (a typical red belt region) with 16 percent of the vote compared to its showing of 18 percent in 2003. The vote for KPRF in

Irkutsk was 11 percent on December 2, slightly lower than its national percentage and much lower than its 16 percent showing in 2003. Even the minor parties maintained did better in Siberia. Ten percent of the voters in Altay Kray voted for parties that did not make it into the Duma compared with 12 percent in Irkutsk. Nationally, only eight percent voted for such parties.

¶10. (C) Aleksey Petrov from the Union of Right Forces (SPS) described a dour mood among Irkutsk party members. SPS had conducted its own poll two weeks before the election which indicated up to nine percent of the respondents would vote for the party. However, on December 2, SPS received only 1.5 percent of the vote. As a result, the leader of Irkutsk SPS resigned with three other top leaders (including Petrov).

A Sea Change Along the Volga

¶11. (C) In Samara, election results demonstrated a remarkable shift in electoral fortunes for Just Russia, SPS, and United Russia. United Russia won just over half of the votes cast -- a more than 20 percent increase over the March regional elections and the 2003 Duma elections, in which the party received around 33 percent of the vote. "Just Russia," which did surprisingly well in the March regional election and the Samara Mayor's race, saw its support plummet from 15 percent to only 8.9 percent on December 2. Vladimir Zvonovskiy of the Fund for Social Research traced United Russia's improved fortunes to votes thrown to United Russia from the newly-created "Green" party, which was connected to a local oligarch, and which had received 8 percent of the vote in the March regional elections. Also nudging United Russia's numbers was the "Putin factor;" citizens heeding the President's call for support. Zvonovskiy ascribed SPS's drop in the polls, from 8 percent in March to one percent in December, to the failure of the party's campaign, which seemed to abandon the traditional "liberal" agenda for a more anti-establishment tone.

¶12. (C) Penza Oblast's election data, particularly reports on voting turnout over the course of the day, provide some evidence that Governor Bochkarev used administrative resources to "get out the vote" for United Russia. By 10:00 A.M. on election day, more than 9 percent of the population had already voted, and by day's end more than 70 percent of the registered voters had cast their ballots. Penza also had a high percentage of voters who participated "outside of their polling places," a practice that could have allowed Russian officials to "manage" returns without independent oversight. Semen Vaykhshtayn, the Chief Editor of Penza's Ekho Moskvyy, noted that the increased turnout was "normal," with the population more energized by Putin's participation in the race. He admitted there were instances of administrative pressure, particularly the registration of "non-local" students in local universities to vote in Penza. Vaykhshtayn thought the results as meeting expectations, but pointed out that the KPRF did less well than expected by 3-4 percentage points (receiving 13 percent instead of the expected 17-18 percent). Aleksandr Esenkov of Just Russia voiced his disappointment with the results not only of the Duma race in which the party received only 5 percent, but

also for the regional legislature. In parallel elections on December 2, his party barely scraped by the 7 percent threshold to enter the regional legislature to win one seat in the 25-member body. The KPRF won two seats, while United Russia swept the rest.

United Russia's "Solid South"

¶13. (C) In Stavropol Kray, Just Russia received only one-third of the votes it won in the March 2007 elections, dropping from 37% to 13%, while United Russia discovered hitherto unknown popularity by soaring from 23% to 61%. As reported in ref a, United Russia was stung by its loss in March (the only region where it received fewer votes than

Just Russia), and responded by removing the governor from the party, replacing the head of the Stavropol Elections Commission with a United Russia lawyer, and bringing in nationally-popular figures such as Minister of Emergency Situations Shoigu, an Olympic gold-medal wrestler, and a pop singer to head its regional list. Shortly before the election, the Just Russia regional list was decapitated when local дума Speaker Andrey Utkin removed himself, citing a desire to focus on local politics. Soon thereafter, the regional elections commission removed head of the Just Russia list Stavropol Mayor Dmitriy Kuzmin from the ballot for illegal campaigning. The local prosecutor subsequently announced investigations of Utkin and Kuzmin on separate corruption charges and just prior to the election local media widely reported that a search of the mayor's office had turned up an embarrassing collection of Nazi memorabilia. Just Russia and its predecessors had historically done well in the region, with Just Russia's constituent party Rodina even outpolling the KPRF in the past. The KPRF had received a solid 14% of the vote in past elections, but pulled only 11% on December 2.

¶14. (C) There were few surprises in Rostov-on-Don, where turnout approached 70 percent and United Russia likewise pulled in 70 percent of the vote. United Russia representatives has promised as much during our visit there two weeks before the election (ref b). If, as expected, neither the governor nor the head of the local дума take up their seats, they may be used to reward members in regions where the party did not do as well.

Closer to Moscow, Some Variation

15 (SBU) In the Lipetsk region south of Moscow, results tracked the national norm. United Russia saw its percentage of the vote increase by leaps from the 2003 Duma elections in which it received 28 percent of the vote, to a 50 percent take in regional elections in October 2007, to the December 2 elections in which it received 63 percent. KPRF's support dropped by nearly seven thousand voters to 13 percent of the vote (down from 17.5 percent in the 2003 elections). Lipetsk, unlike many regions in Russia, did not see its total numbers of voters increase.

¶16. (C) Although KPRF received enough votes in Voronezh (208,000 or 16 percent) to send two deputies to the federal Duma, KPRF local party official Lidiya Kuznetsova said the elections were "even dirtier and more unfair than usual." According to Kuznetsova, local government officials were told to ensure 65 percent for United Russia. While some districts in the region exceeded that number, in the end 56.6 percent of the region's vote went to United Russia. Although United Russia received a lower percentage in Voronezh than the national average of 64 percent, support for the party more than doubled since the 2003 Duma elections. The biggest loser was Just Russia, which saw its percentage of votes it received as the "Rodina" party drop from 23.7 percent in 2003 to only nine percent in 2007.

Comment

¶17. (C) While not an exhaustive review of electoral statistics, these results from regions in which we have engaged in substantial outreach over the past year provide a snapshot of United Russia's use of its great advantage in local and federal administrative assets to get out the vote, or at least its vote. A still unanswered question raised by some observers is how in a country that demographers claim is losing population every year, an additional 200,000 eligible voters appeared on the rolls.

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